

A comparative study on teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education in Slovenia, Lithuania, and Finland

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ABSTRACT

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Inclusive education is an evolving ideological and practical change in the education sector globally. Teachers' attitudes and commitment to inclusive education has an important role. Inclusive education is a context-related phenomenon, and for successful national-level implementation, national differences and needs have to be acknowledged.

This research studied 1067 teachers in Finland, Lithuania and Slovenia comparing their attitudes towards inclusive education using Sentiments, Attitudes and Concerns in Inclusive Education (SACIE) scale and investigated background factors' relation to the attitudes in each country. Differences between the teachers, divided by teaching experience, was studied in order to understand if any societal, political, and historical changes influence teachers' attitudes. Data were analysed by using M/ ANOVA and forced linear regression analysis.

Results showed that there are differences in teachers attitudes towards inclusive education between the countries. Background factors related to Sentiments, Attitudes and Concerns varied in each country. In Lithuania, results indicated attitudinal changes, the younger generation being more positive towards inclusive education. Results provide tools to plan specific actions in each country for the successful implementation of inclusive education.

In the future, mixed-method research analysis will provide more in-depth information as well as the comparison of countries with different income level. In order to understand better teachers' attitudes in these countries, an additional study on the influence of efficacy and social norms would be beneficial.

Keywords: teachers' attitudes, inclusive education, comparative research

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1 INTRODUCTION

After the Salamanca Statement 1994, inclusive education has become a part of mainstream education systems (Engelbrecht & Savolainen, 2018; Engelbrecht, Savolainen, Nel, & Malinen, 2013; Yada, Tolvanen, & Savolainen, 2018). UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities also highlights the right-based approach to inclusive education (United Nations). Inclusive education has changed the approach globally on how to teach children with different educational needs as understanding and implementation of inclusive education has evolved during the years (Yada et al., 2018). Globally, the number of children needing different level support in their learning has significantly increased (Ewing, Monsen, & Kielblock, 2018; Sharma, Aiello, Pace, Round, & Subbam, 2018). In the implementation of inclusive education, national and cultural differences are seen globally (Yada et al., 2018).

Several researchers point out the role of the teacher to be a significant factor in the successful implementation of inclusive education as it is dependent on the positive attitudes of the teachers, not just skills and training (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; Avramidis & Kalyva, 2007; Yada et al., 2018). Attitudes of teachers do vary (Ewing et al., 2018), and teacher's understanding and interpretation of inclusive education and how they perceive their role as a teacher have a significant impact on implementation (Avramidis & Kalyva, 2007). Understanding the attitudes of teachers is a key factor in order to plan the designs and evaluate the initiatives on improving attitudes towards learners with disabilities (Antonak & Livneh, 2000). It has been noted that teachers' positive attitudes towards inclusive education increase inclusive behaviour in the classroom (MacFarlane & Woolfson, 2013). Teachers, who feel positive about inclusive education, also are more willing to develop a more inclusive classroom learning environment. Teachers' negative attitudes are connected to poor student satisfaction and cohesiveness as well to more challenges learners with disabilities face with their peers in the classroom. (Monsen, Ewing, & Kwoka, 2014) Therefore, understanding the positive and negative attitudes of teachers is essential in order to develop relevant support for teachers working in inclusive classes and schools (Ewing et al., 2018).

Several researchers have done multinational and comparative studies on teachers' attitudes (Malinen et al., 2013; Savolainen, Engelbrecht, Nel, & Malinen, 2012; Sharma et al., 2018; Yada et al., 2018). The international comparison provides valuable information on factors that shape teachers' attitudes in different contexts globally (Sharma et al., 2018). Although the number of this type of study has increased, the impact of historical and cultural factors towards the attitudes of teachers has not been given enough attention (Engelbrecht et al., 2013). Therefore, it is essential to understand that considering this complex phenomenon while implementing comparative analysis will provide more insight into the teacher's attitudes.

1.1 Attitudes

Attitudes are not a new concept, and it has been an essential part of psychology. However, in recent years, there has been an interest in conceptualising the attitudinal process and finding links between attitude structures and processes of attitudinal changes. There is also a growing field of research on implicit attitudes (Bohner & Dickel, 2011). Bohner & Dickel (2011,392) define an attitude to be an "evaluation of an object of thought". Attitude object has consisted of things that are held in a person's mind, varying from the ordinary, everyday things to more abstract, like ideas, people, and things. Researchers do agree mostly on this basic definition of attitude. There are more disagreement and different approaches when considering more elaborate models of attitudes (Bohner & Dickel, 2011).

According to Bohner & Dickel (2011), models of attitudes are mostly divided into two approaches; stable-entry or more constructivist views, although you can also find intermediate positioned approaches. Stable-entry side models, like Fazio's MODE-model and Petty et al. 's MCM-model, see attitudes as long-term memory structures. More constructivist approaches can be found, e.g., from Garowski and Bodenhausen's APE-model, where it is viewed that attitudes are constructed while in the situation. (Bohner & Dickel, 2011)

In order to measure attitudes, explicit self-report attitude scales have been used until during the last decades as implicit attitude scales have become more common. In

a self-report scale, the assumption is that the person is willing to answer honestly to the questions, which is not always the case. Implicit response-time-based attitude scales will provide more depth information as it minimises motivated response biases and can investigate aspects of attitudes that are not open to self-examination. (Bohner & Dickel, 2011)

The focus of this research is to understand more about teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education. In Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), the behaviour has three variables; attitudes, social norms and efficacy (Sharma et al., 2018). In TPB, it is believed that a person's attitudes towards behaviour are based on a person's own beliefs (de Leeuw, Valois, Ajzen, & Schmidt, 2015). A person learns that a certain type of behaviour brings out the positive outcomes and forms a positive attitude towards that kind of behaviour. When outcomes are negative, the person forms a negative attitude towards that type of behaviour. (de Leeuw et al., 2015) Sharma et al. (2018) state that according to TPB, the actual behaviour of a person can be predicted by what is the person's intention to perform certain types of behaviour. They also believe, that applying TPB in a sector of inclusive education, can explain better and with more depth the willingness of the teachers, and predict more precisely their behaviour in the classrooms. TBP also suggests that background factors, like gender, education, personality, and experience, can influence the beliefs people have (de Leeuw et al., 2015).

Focusing on the attitudes of teachers is crucial for the successful implementation of inclusive education as it is one of the key factors of success (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002). People who are responsible for the implementation of all policies need to agree with the policy and philosophy behind it in the order it to work (Boyle, Topping, & Jindal-Snape, 2013) as the attitude of teachers affects the quality of planning and, therefore, to the quality of inclusive education. Teachers' attitudes influence whether a teacher decides to facilitate the implementation of the policies or not (Avramidis, Bayliss, & Burden, 2000). Negative attitudes may decrease the teacher's motivation to develop their competence to teach learners with different educational needs (Štemberger & Kiswarday, 2018).

Avramidis & Norwich (2002), in their review on several studies, concluded that attitudes of teachers were more influenced by child-related factors than teacher-related

factors (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; Yada et al., 2018). The severity and type of disability was the most significant factor influencing the willingness of the teachers to implement inclusive education (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; Avramidis et al., 2000; Avramidis & Kalyva, 2007). Also, environment-related factors were connected to the attitudes towards inclusion (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; Yada et al., 2018). Support in a classroom and school, proper planning, availability of resources, and support from the management were found to be associated with positive attitudes towards inclusive education (Avramidis & Kalyva, 2007). However, attitudes of teachers' do vary between different countries depending on their cultural or historical background (Engelbrecht & Savolainen, 2018; Yada et al. 2019). By analysing the attitudes of teachers, it can be predicted whether the principles of inclusive education are implemented in the classroom level or not (Ewing et al., 2018).

1.2 Cultural-historical perspective in inclusive education

The development of inclusive education in a cultural-historical perspective and its outcomes is a complex and multidimensional phenomenon. Different countries develop inclusive education in quite different directions at a very different rate. Therefore, there is no one type of inclusion, as Dyson (1999) writes, we can talk about inclusions. Dyson has introduced four discourses of inclusion. Parts of the justification discourse are the rights and ethics discourse, and efficacy discourse that focuses more on the "rightness" of providing inclusive education and provides justification for it (Dyson, 1999; Moberg, Muta, Korenaga, Kuorelahti, & Savolainen, 2019). Implementing discourses are political and pragmatic discourses that focus on societal and political change in educational structures and on practicalities on how inclusive education and inclusive pedagogy are implemented and how inclusive schools function as organisations (Dyson, 1999). In practice, these discourses are intertwined (Artiles, Kozleski, Dorn, & Christensen, 2006), and how these discourses are emphasised, varies in each country.

As inclusion is affected by its context, it always reflects the outcomes of historical and cultural choices (Artiles & Dyson, 2005). Interaction of contexts of longstanding

historical, educational, and community mould structures and systems how education is practised (Kozleski & Waitoller, 2010). Including history and culture and their role in the analysis of the development of inclusive education, provides tools to understand how educational structures are influenced by cultural assumptions and how those are placed in the cultural context of each country (Engelbrecht et al., 2013). In order to achieve more in-depth understanding on universal inclusive education, clearer focus needs to be given towards impact of cultural and historical context on development of inclusive education (Moberg et al., 2019) as each system is affected by its historical and cultural backgrounds and main aim should be to understand the context of each country (Dyson & Millward, 2000). In addition to understanding the context, according to Lee (2011), the cultural-historical approach reminds researchers about reflexivity and reminds to see things holistically.

Therefore, cross-cultural research provides knowledge on the differences and similarities between the countries (Moberg et al., 2019; Yada A. et al., 2019). According to Artiles and Dyson (2005), comparative analyses allow researchers to understand different variations and discover patterns to see how educational systems are shaped by political, societal, economic, and cultural factors of each country (Artiles & Dyson, 2005). The relation between teacher's attitudes and successful implementation of inclusive education has become a more prominent factor and, therefore, better validated cross-cultural comparisons are needed (Murdaca, Oliva, & Costa, 2018). There are several cross-cultural studies done on teachers' attitudes and self-efficacy in inclusive education (e.g., Engelbrecht & Savolainen, 2018; Engelbrecht et al., 2013; Moberg et al. 2019; Sharma et al. 2018; Yada A. et al., 2019; Yada et al., 2018).

1.3 Inclusive education in Lithuania, Slovenia, and Finland

Inclusive education aims to remove barriers of participation for marginalised groups, as stated by Engelbrecht and Savolainen (2018). Generally, inclusive education is seen to focus on marginalised groups such as children with ethnic minorities, low socio-economic groups, disabilities, and other disadvantaged groups (Yada A. et al., 2019).

This research focuses on the education of children with disabilities or with special educational needs, in inclusive education in Lithuania, Slovenia, and Finland. In this section, the development of inclusive education in each country is introduced.

Lithuanian inclusive education. Since gaining independence in 1990, Lithuania has been developing its education system to be more inclusive (Evans & Sabaliauskienė, 2010; Jucevičienė, 2005; Zelvys, 2004). Change from the Soviet-era defectology has been faster than their neighbouring countries (Evans & Sabaliauskienė, 2010) as Lithuania had held relationships to the West (Evans & Sabaliauskienė, 2010; Zelvys, 2004) and gained assistance to their educational reform from West European countries (Zelvys, 2004) and has been greatly influenced by international agreements and forums, e.g., UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and Dakar Education Forum (Evans & Sabaliauskienė, 2010).

Already before independence, some teachers had piloted teaching children with some disabilities in their classroom (Evans & Sabaliauskienė, 2010) and it can be considered that the reformation had already started before the independence as a result of Soviet Union's perestroika-policy (Pranevičienė & Margevičiūtė, 2015). Country's first Education Law came to force in 1991 (Government of Lithuania, Ministry of Education, 2011; Pranevičienė & Margevičiūtė, 2015; Zelvys, 2004). The Education law has been revised several times since (Pranevičienė & Margevičiūtė, 2015; Zelvys, 2004) and the responsibility of school networks lies now on municipals (OECD, 2017).

All mainstream schools are compelled to provide education to all learners (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2018; Jucevičienė, 2005) although according to Šukys, Dumčienė and Lapėnienė (2015, p. 328), Ciuladienė and Pauzienė in their research in Lithuanian (2012) claim that most schools in Lithuania do not have the preparedness to implement inclusive education. Despite this criticism, numbers of SEN students have been increasing in Lithuanian mainstream comprehensive schools (Alisauskas, Alisauskiene, & Milteniene, 2015). In Lithuania, special educational needs include, e.g., learning difficulties, different disabilities, minorities (ethnic minorities as well), and emotional challenges (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2018). In 2010, the support system for students with special

educational needs was three-level structured; school-based commissions, local pedagogical-psychological centres, and a National Pedagogical-Psychological Centre (Evans & Sabaliauskienė, 2010).

Slovenian inclusive education. Education in Slovenia has strongly been influenced by its history, political systems, and dominant cultural practices of Eastern European countries (Stepaniuk, 2018). Slovenian view on special education was based on Defectology (Lesar, 2018), influenced by Soviet philosophy that has moulded educational systems, structures, and pedagogical traditions in Eastern Europe (Stepaniuk, 2018), including areas under former Yugoslavia. Although Slovenia is not officially part of Eastern Europe (United Nations Statistics Division, 2019), it has been part of researches analysing inclusive education in Eastern Europe, e.g., Stepaniuk 2018.

Slovenian process to develop inclusive education has been slow process from segregative arrangements towards inclusion (Štemberger & Kiswarday, 2018; Šuc, Bukovec, Žveglič, & Karpljuk, 2016), although it had always maintained a close relationship with Western European countries (Peček & Macura-Milovanović, 2012). Before the independence, between 1960-1980, drop-out rates in primary education were high (Kavkler, Babuder, & Magajna, 2015) and it forced professionals to create more preventive measures, and country developed more comprehensive education system (Kavkler et al., 2015; Lesar, 2018) After the independence, the White paper on Education in Slovenia was prepared, and it came in force 1995. In 2000, Placement of Children with Special Education Needs Act, was the first education law to push inclusive education and it gave a right for a child to attend the nearest school (Čagran & Schmidt, 2011; Štemberger & Kiswarday, 2018), with a requirement to achieve the educational standards of school curricula (Peček & Macura-Milovanović, 2012). Parents' gained the right to choose where their children were to be educated, which decreased the number of children in special schools (Štemberger & Kiswarday, 2018).

What has started as integration, has gradually moved towards inclusion. In Slovenia, children who are seen as students with special educational needs are mainly children with a particular type of disabilities, behavioural challenges (Štemberger & Kiswarday, 2018) and challenges in learning, after the pressure from families and sev-

eral professionals (Kavkler et al., 2015). However, there is also criticism towards Slovenia as the process towards more inclusive education system has been very slow as the focus is more on standards and national results than on needs of children which affect teachers' willingness to receive SEN students in their classrooms (Kavkler et al., 2015; Peček & Macura-Milovanović, 2012). Also, Lesar (2018) on her review on inclusive education courses in Slovenian universities concluded that some of the courses "promoted the implementation of the concept of integration rather than inclusiveness" (Lesar, 2018, p. 709).

Finnish inclusive education. Finland implemented school system reform in the 1970s into comprehensive schools (Engelbrecht & Savolainen, 2018; Sahlberg, 2012), aiming to promote equality (Kivirauma, Klemelä, & Rinne, 2006). As a result of the reform, also special education developed (Moberg et al., 2019); full-time (Engelbrecht & Savolainen, 2018) and part-time special education became part of an educational structure (Kivirauma et al., 2006). It seems that part-time education has been one of the success factors in PISA-test on reading (Moberg et al., 2019; Sahlberg, 2012).

There has been a systematic reform in the 2000s' to make mainstream classrooms more inclusive in order to reduce separate special education programs (Engelbrecht & Savolainen, 2018; Pulkkinen, 2019). In 2010, the Revised Act on Basic Education came into force, which requires schools to provide adequate learning support in mainstream classrooms (Engelbrecht et al., 2013).

All schools are required to provide a three-tiered support system for students: general support, intensified support, and special support (Engelbrecht & Savolainen, 2018; Finnish National Board of Education, 2010; Pulkkinen, 2019; Yada A. et al., 2019). If the needs of the child do not require any other solutions, primary placement is in mainstream schools (Engelbrecht & Savolainen, 2018). General support is provided to students that need support occasionally in certain subjects as intensified support is provided if the need is regular, and a personal learning plan is created (Pulkkinen, 2019). Special support systematic form has a more holistic approach than before and is based on a pedagogical review and writing of each child's own Individual Education Plan (IEP) (Finnish National Board of Education, 2010). If the child requires intensified

or special support, the learning plan is always required, but only special support requires an administrative decision. (Finnish National Board of Education, 2010) However, in Finland, clear directives on inclusive education per se are not included in laws or policies (Engelbrecht & Savolainen, 2018).

1.4 Research questions

This research investigates teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education in Lithuania, Slovenia, and Finland and will focus on comparing teachers' sentiments, attitudes, and concerns towards inclusive education. Also, the research will investigate how teachers' background factors, such as age and gender, and experience on teaching in general and on teaching students with disabilities as well the knowledge on disability laws affect their attitudes in these three countries and are there any similarities or differences.

Data will not only be compared by countries, but it also will investigate whether the cultural-historical change has impacted the attitudes of teachers by comparing attitudes of the teachers in Lithuania and Slovenia. These results then will be compared to Finnish data. Focus is given to time after of the societal and political changes when Lithuania and Slovenia gained their independence in 1990-1991 (OECD, 2017; Government of the Republic of Slovenia, 2019) and after changes in countries' educational system. This research will investigate whether there are any differences in the attitudes of teachers who have started working before or after 2000. In 2000 first inclusive-orientated education law came to force in Slovenia (Štemberger & Kiswarday, 2018; Čagran & Schmidt, 2011), and Lithuania joined the Dakar Education Forum that addressed actively inclusive education, although Lithuania had developed more inclusive education system even before (Evans & Sabaliauskienė, 2010).

Research questions are:

1. What is the overall level of attitudes and sub-dimensions in Lithuania, Slovenia, and Finland? Are there differences between the countries or between sub-dimensions within the countries?

2. How are teachers' background factors related to their attitudes towards inclusive education in Lithuania, Slovenia, and Finland? Are there differences between the countries or between sub-dimensions within the countries?
3. Are there differences between the teachers who have started teaching before or after 2000 across the sub-dimensions of attitudes in Lithuania, Slovenia, and Finland?

2 RESEARCH METHODS

Data is a part of a collaborative project on teachers' role in inclusive education which was planned between researchers from China, England, Finland, Lithuania, Slovenia and South Africa. This project aimed to map the variety of implementation of inclusive education in these countries. Many countries have laws and legislations to support inclusive education, but practical implementation varies. Internationally, the impact of these differences is not always understood, and the impact of culture and context towards the teachers is not considered.

2.1 Participants

Data consists of the answers of 1067 participants. In Finland, there were 295 participants, of which 23.4% were males (n=69). In Slovenian data, there were 346 participants, with 6.4% of them being males (n=22). Lithuanian data had 426 participants, males 5,2 % (n=22). See table 1.

Age. The average age in Finnish data was 44.55 years (females 44.28, males 45.44), with an age range from 24 to 65 years. Slovenian data shows average age to be 42.31 years (females 42.40, males 40.95), age range from 23 to 61 years. In Lithuania average age was 43.50 years (females 43.34, males 46.16); the age range was from 22 to 67 years.

Teaching experience. The teaching experience was measured with years of working. In Finland, the average teaching experience was 17.36, 17.04 with female teachers, and 18.39 with male teachers. The teaching experience range with females 1-39 and with males 1-40. The average teaching experience in Slovenia was 18.63, 18.79 years with female teachers, and 16.24 with male teachers. Range with female teachers was 1-37 years and with male teachers 3-32 years. In Lithuania, average teaching experience in years was 19.29, 19.27 with female teachers, and 19.70 with male teachers. With females, the year range was 0-44 years, and with males 2-39 years.

Table 1. Demographics of the sample

	Finland:	Slovenia:	Lithuania:
Gender (female %)	76.60	93.60	94.80
Age (mean):	44.55	42.31	43.50
Female:	44.28	42.40	43.34
Male:	43.50	43.34	46.16
Years of teaching experience (mean):	17.36	18.63	19.29
Female:	17.04	18.79	19.27
Male:	18.39	16.24	19.70

Level of experience in teaching children with disabilities. The level of experience in teaching children with disabilities (CWD) was measured with a five-point scale of 1-5 (very low, low, average, high, very high). Generally, the average level of experience was 3.08. In Finland, the level of experience teaching CWD average was 3.12, with a range of 1-5. Women seemed to have a little bit more experience, average 3.15, than men, an average of 3.03. The average level of experience in Slovenia was 3.11. Opposite to Finland, in Slovenia, men seemed to have more experience, an average of 3.27 with a range 2-4, than women with an average of 3.10 with range 1-5. Lithuanian teachers seemed to have the least experience, average being 3.01. In Lithuania, women had more experience, an average of 3.03 with a range 1-5, with men having an average of 2.75 with a range 1-4.

Level of confidence to teach children with disabilities. The level of confidence to teach children with disabilities was also measured with a five-point scale of 1-5 (very low, low, average, high, very high). The average level of confidence with all participants was 3.12. The total level of confidence in Finland was the highest of these three countries, with an average of 3.30. There was no difference between genders as the average of women was 3.30, and the average of men was 3.28, with both having a range from 1 to 5. Slovenian average level of confidence was 3.01. Men felt more confident with an average of 3.18 than women, an average of 3.00. In Slovenia, women answered with the range of 1-5 while men's range was 2-4. Lithuanian data showed the average level in confidence to be 3.06. Women felt more confident, an average of 3.07 than men, an average of 2.86. Range with women was from 1 to 5 and with men from 1 to 4.

Knowledge of local disability laws and policies. The knowledge of local disability laws and policies was measured with a five-point scale of 1-5 (none, poor, average, good, very good). Generally, the level of knowledge on local disability laws and policies was 2.83. In Finland, the data showed the knowledge to be below the average level, with an average of 2.74 (female 2.73, male 2.79). The range of answers was from 1 to 5 with both genders. In Slovenia, the knowledge level was 2.81, with no difference between the genders (female 2.81, male 2.82). The range for women was from 1 to 5, and with men, it was from 2 to 4. Lithuanian level of knowledge was closest to the average level between these three countries, with an average of 2.96. Women's average was 2.97, with a range from 1 to 5. Men's average was 2.77, with the range of 2-4.

2.2 Data collection

Data has been collected as a part of the larger project (Engelbrecht et al., 2013) in 2010-11. This research summarises data collected from Lithuania, Slovenia, and Finland using Sentiments, Attitudes, and Concerns about Inclusive Education (SACIE) scale. SACIE is one of the few questionnaires measuring affective, cognitive, and behavioural components of teachers' attitudes (Ewing et al., 2018).

Finnish data (n = 295) was collected from 5 municipalities in Eastern Finland (Savolainen et al., 2012) as a part of the research done by ISKE Kelpo-network funded by Ministry of Education in Finland. A questionnaire was piloted with a small group (n = 20) of teachers before finalising the questionnaire. The questionnaire was sent to schools with information on research attached and answering the questionnaire was voluntary. Schools that participated were comprehensive schools, from 1st to 9th grade; no special schools were part of the research. Some of these comprehensive schools had some special classes, and all of the schools had special education professionals working in schools. The exact return rate was not recorded, but the assumption is that the return rate was approximately around 60% (Savolainen et al., 2012).

In Slovenia, the Slovenian version of the questionnaire was first piloted in Faculty of Education of the University of Ljubljana before the finalising. The questionnaire was sent to 765 teachers in 51 schools in all regions in Slovenia. These primary schools had

students from 1st to 9th grade, and some schools had special classes in them and had special education specialists in schools. No special schools were part of the research. In the end, 346 questionnaires were returned from 30 schools with a return rate of 45.2%. Lithuanian version of the questionnaire was piloted in two mainstream schools in Siauliai City. Finalised version was sent to 550 teachers in 35 schools selected by region and size of the schools. All schools were basic and secondary schools having grades from 1 to 12. The return rate was 77.45% (n = 426).

The SACIE scale includes three sub-scales: Sentiments, Attitudes, and Concerns, and has 15 statements. Answer options are forced-choice 4-point Likert-scale (strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree). It is designed so that the person cannot give neutral responses to the statements. (Forlin, Earle, Loreman, & Sharma, 2011) In this study, items are scored so that higher SACIE overall and sub-scale scores are, the more positive the teachers' attitudes are. SACIE scale is created to measure three aspects of attitudes: general attitudes towards disabilities with Sentiments sub-scale, general attitudes towards inclusion with Attitudes sub-scale, and specific attitudes towards inclusion in one's own context with Concerns sub-scale (Engelbrecht & Savolainen, 2018).

Sentiments sub-scale included five items (I find it difficult to overcome my initial shock when meeting people with severe physical disabilities; I am afraid to look people with disabilities straight in the face; I tend to make contacts with people with disabilities brief, and I finish them as quickly as possible; I would feel terrible if I had a disability; I dread the thought that I could eventually end up with a disability). (Forlin et al., 2011) However, this sub-scale shortened by removing entirely the items "I would feel terrible if I had a disability" and "I dread the thought that I could eventually end up with a disability" as it was considered these two items not to fit to the factor structure of this sub-scale (Savolainen et al., 2012).

Attitudes sub-scale also included five items (Students who have difficulty expressing their thoughts verbally should be in regular classes; Students who are inattentive should be in regular classes; Students who require communicative technologies (for example Braille and sign language) should be in regular classes; Students who

frequently fail exams should be in regular classes; Students who need an individualised education plan should be in regular classes) (Forlin et al., 2011), and all of them were included into the analysis.

In Concerns sub-scale there were also five items (I am concerned that students with disabilities will not be accepted by the rest of the class; I am concerned that it will be difficult to give appropriate attention to all students in an inclusive classroom; I am concerned that my workload will increase if I have students with disabilities in my class; I am concerned that I will be more stressed if I have students with disabilities in my class; I am concerned that I do not have the knowledge and skills required to teach students with disabilities) (Forlin et al., 2011).

The reliability of this scale was measured by Cronbach's alpha. For Sentiments sub-scale (Finland .603, Slovenia .740 and Lithuania .478) it was noted that item 5 "I tend to make contacts with people with disabilities brief, and I finish them as quickly as possible" lowered Lithuania's Cronbach's alpha. However, if it had been removed from each country, it would have lowered too much Finland's and Slovenia's Cronbach's alphas, so it was kept in the analysis. For Attitudes sub-scale, adequate reliability was calculated (Finland .703, Slovenia .647, Lithuania .647). For the Concerns sub-scale, it was noticed that item 1, "I am concerned that students with disabilities will not be accepted by the rest of the class", lowered the reliability and was removed from each country. Cronbach's alphas were calculated to the remaining items (Finland .786, Slovenia .728, Lithuania .623) and showed adequate reliability.

2.3 Data analyses

Data were analysed with SPSS 24 program. Firstly, the data were checked for normality and linearity. All background factors (gender, age, teaching experience, level of experience in teaching learners with disabilities (LWD), level of confidence to teach learners with disabilities, and level of knowledge on local disability laws and regulations) were normal and linear. In SACIE, the total scores, sub-scales of Attitudes, and Concerns were normal, but sub-scale of Sentiments was skewed. Therefore, both Pear-

son's and Spearman's correlations were calculated for the variables (see table 2). Correlations had enough similarities to continue with the analysis. In the Sentiments sub-scale, outliers were corrected before the analysis.

For general attitudes towards inclusive education, overall scales of SACIE were calculated as well for each sub-dimension (Sentiments, Attitudes, and Concerns). Means, standard deviations, and 95% confidence intervals were calculated. Results were also confirmed with MANOVA, SACIE sub-scales as dependent variables and countries as a fixed factor.

In order to compare how background factors are related to the Attitudes and Concerns sub-scales between Finland, Lithuania, and Slovenia, a forced linear regression analysis was conducted as all variables were subjects of interest. It was noted that age and teaching experience had multicollinearity, and thus age was left out of the further analyses as the teaching experience was seen more important factor than the age of the participants. For correlations, means, and standard deviations, see Table 2. As mentioned, sentiments sub-scale was skewed, but as the conversion did not normalise the distribution well enough, the original data was used. Linear regression analysis was conducted to each sub-scale so that sub-scale variable was a dependent variable and background factors (gender, teaching experience, knowledge on local disability laws and regulations, level of experience on teaching learners with disabilities and level of confidence to teach learners with disabilities) as predictors.

ANOVA, means, standard deviations, and confidence intervals provided information on the possible differences in attitudes due to the cultural-historical changes in the societies and between countries. In order to compare each sub-scale with groups of teachers who have started working before or after 2000, teachers were divided into two groups by teaching experience 0-10 years and teaching experience 11-44 years. For Concerns and Attitudes and Sentiments sub-scales, ANOVA was calculated individually to each sub-scale, each sub-scale as a dependent variable and teaching experience groups as a fixed factor while the file was split by country.

SACIE scale has been validated to be used in many countries, such as India, Hongkong, Singapore, Canada, Finland, South Africa (Forlin et al., 2011; Savolainen et

al., 2012), and, therefore, no factor analysis was conducted. Also, cross-cultural validity has been reported for the SACIE scale (Forlin, Earle, Loreman, & Sharma, 2011).

Table 2: Means (M), standard deviations (SD) and Pearson correlations of the 6 background factors and experience and SACIE subscales

	Gender	Age	Teaching experience	Knowledge on local disability laws and regulations	Level of confidence to teach LWD	Level of experience to teach LWD	SACIE Sentiments	SACIE Attitudes	SACIE Concerns
Gender	-								
Age	0.44	-							
Teaching experience	-.013	.904**	-						
Knowledge on local disability laws and regulations	-.038	.005	.028	-					
Level of confidence to teach LWD	.028	.052	.026	.552**	-				
Level of experience to teach LWD	-.029	.140**	.145**	.552**	.742**	-			
SACIE Sentiments	.009	-.007	-.013	.374**	.359**	.352**	-		
SACIE Attitudes	.099**	.021	-.043	.130**	.260**	.197**	.101**	-	
SACIE Concerns	-.035	.051	.038	.173**	.218**	.194**	.199**	.092**	-
<i>M</i>	1.11	43.40	18.56	2.85	3.11	3.07	3.41	2.55	2.26
<i>SD</i>	.309	8.969	9.878	.873	.789	.942	.54	.50	.65

2.4 Ethical considerations

As a researcher, a person has a responsibility to produce reliable, honest and relevant findings that can be generalised and provides new information on the topic (Hirsjärvi, Remes, & Sajavaara, 2009). This research has been conducted with integrity, meticulousness and accuracy (Finnish Advisory Board of Research Integrity, 2012) in all planning, conducting and reporting. Also, the work of other researchers has been respected and cited accordingly.

Data from Finland, Slovenia and Lithuania were collected during 2010 and 2011. Data had been processed by people responsible in each respected country before received by the researcher. Participating in the study was voluntary, and questionnaires were sent to teachers with information about the study. Teachers were able to express their informed voluntary participation by ticking “informed consent” in the questionnaire.

Data from Finland, Slovenia and Lithuania have been received by the researcher for the Master’s thesis purposes solely. All data has been protected accordingly, and participants have full anonymity. All information given to the researcher are confidential, and all records have been stored securely. Data and its modifications will be returned to the University of Jyväskylä when research is finalised.

Responsibility of the researcher is also to provide as objective and neutral approach as possible (Hirsjärvi et al., 2009). In this paper, the researcher does not have any personal relationship or conflict of interest with any of the participants. Research planning, background theories, data processing, analysing, and methods have been reported transparently and accurately, and are communicated openly and responsibly in the paper (Finnish Advisory Board of Research Integrity, 2012).

3 RESULTS

3.1 General attitudes towards inclusive education in Finland, Slovenia, and Lithuania

The general attitude towards inclusive education (all three dimensions combined) was over the neutral point of 2.5 in each country (see table 3). Finnish teachers were the most positive, while Slovenian teachers had the lowest score. There was no statistically significant difference in overall scores of SACIE between the countries as confidence intervals do overlap.

Table 3: Means (M), standard deviation (SD) and 95% confidence intervals (CI) of SACIE total and sub-scales

		SACIE all	Sentiments	Attitudes	Concerns
Finland	M	2.69	3.74	2.58	2.05
	SD	.43	.42	.55	.76
	95% CI	2.64 ; 2.74	3.69 ; 3.78	2.51 ; 2.64	1.97 ; 2.14
Slovenia	M	2.64	3.42	2.51	2.20
	SD	.37	.51	.46	.58
	95% CI	2.60 ; 2.68	3.37 ; 3.47	2.47 ; 2.56	2.14 ; 2.26
Lithuania	M	2.68	3.18	2.56	2.46
	SD	.34	.52	.50	.56
	95% CI	2.65 ; 2.71	3.13 ; 3.23	2.52 ; 2.61	2.41 ; 2.52

However, when comparing the three sub-scales of Sentiments, Attitudes, and Concerns, more specific differences can be seen. The Sentiments sub-scale shows how positive participants are about interacting with a person with disabilities. Scores were high in each country, but teachers in Finland had the highest score, while the score of Lithuanian teachers was lower. Differences between countries in Sentiments were statistically significant, as suggested by the non-overlapping confidence intervals. The level of attitudes towards including learners with special educational needs in mainstream schools scores were lower than in the Sentiments sub-scale, all scores closer to 2.5 neutral points. However, there were no significant differences between the countries as

confidence intervals did overlap. The scores related to attitudes on including a learner with special educational needs in teacher's own classroom, as described by the Concerns sub-scale, showed to be more negative than in the other two dimensions as the average scores in each country were under the neutral point of 2.5. Teachers in Finland were most concerned, as shown by the lowest average scores. Statistical significance is also seen in the Concerns sub-scale between teachers from Slovenia and Lithuania, teachers from Lithuania being more positive than those from Slovenia.

These findings were confirmed with MANOVA, where Multivariate analysis showed an overall statistically significant difference between the countries $F(6,2104) = 55.09$, $p < .001$, $\text{partial-}\eta^2 = .136$. Univariate analyses showed statistically significant difference between countries in Sentiments sub-scale, $F(2,1053) = 109.930$, $p < .001$, $\text{partial-}\eta^2 = .173$, and in Concerns sub-scale, $F(2,1053) = 40.038$, $p < .001$, $\text{partial-}\eta^2 = .071$, but not in Attitudes sub-scale ($F(2,1053) = 1.383$, $p > 0.1$, $\text{partial-}\eta^2 = .003$). Post hoc tests showed statistically significant differences in Sentiments subscale between Finland- Slovenia, $p < .05$, Finland-Lithuania, $p < .001$, and Slovenia-Lithuania, $p < .001$. In Concerns sub-scale between all countries, difference was statistically significant, $p < .001$.

3.2 Relations of background factors to each SACIE sub-scale

In comparing the relations of background factors towards the attitudes of teachers, a linear regression analysis was conducted to each sub-scale and categorised by each country.

Sentiments sub-scale. Results of the regression analysis for Sentiments sub-scales are introduced in table 4.

Table 4: Result on the forced linear regression analysis on the relations of teachers' background factor on SACIE's Sentiments sub-scale

	Finland			Slovenia			Lithuania		
	β	B	95% CI	β	B	95% CI	B	B	95% CI
Gender	-.075	-.073	-.186 ; .036	.022	.046	-.172 ; .263	.016	.037	-.190 ; .264
Teaching experience	-.071	-.003	-.008 ; .002	.007	.000	-.005 ; .006	-.067	-.004	-.009 ; .002
Knowledge on local disability laws and policies	.250**	.111	.045 ; .117	.074	.048	-.031 ; .126	.031	.018	-.057 ; .094
Level of confidence to teach LWD	.063	.030	-.049 ; .108	.129†	.108	-.017 ; .232	.171*	.108	-.008 ; .224
Level of experience on teaching LWD	.028	.010	-.052 ; .073	.113	.076	-.027 ; .186	-.013	-.007	-.103 ; .088

Finland R² = .109
Slovenia R² = .074
Lithuania R² = .022

Finland: F(5,280) = 6.852, p < .001
Slovenia: F(5,332) = 5.274, p < .001
Lithuania: F(5,395) = 2.826, p < .05

Note. †p < .10; *p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001.

For Finnish teachers, the more knowledge on local disability law and policies were reported, the more positive were the attitudes towards interacting with persons with disabilities. With Lithuanian teachers, confidence to teach learners with disabilities predicted the attitudes. There were no relations with other background factors in Finland and Lithuania. With Slovenian teachers, there were no relations of any of the background factors on Sentiments. Comparing each independent variables' confidence intervals of non-standardized regression coefficients in the Sentiments sub-scale shows no significant differences between the countries as confidence intervals overlap. That is, there are no differences in the relations of any background factors in the attitudes towards interacting with persons with disabilities between the countries.

Attitudes sub-scale. Results of the forced linear regression analysis for Attitudes sub-scales are introduced in table 5.

Table 5: Result on the forced linear regression analysis on the relations of teachers' background factor and experiences on SACIE's Attitudes sub-scale

	Finland			β	Slovenia		β	Lithuania	
	B	B	95% CI		B	95% CI		B	95% CI
Gender	-.098†	-.126	-.270 ; .017	.052	.098	-.106 ; .302	-.074	-.167	-.380 ; .047
Teaching Experience	-.065	-.004	-.010 ; .003	.030	.001	-.004 ; .007	.055	.003	-.002 ; .008
Knowledge on local disability laws and policies	.131†	.077	-.010 ; .163	.026	.015	-.058 ; .088	.079	.040	-.031 ; .111
Level of confidence to teach LWD	.230**	.141	.039 ; .244	-.006	-.005	-.121 ; .112	.181*	.110	.001 ; .220
Level of experience on teaching LWD	-.008	-.004	-.004 ; .078	.081	.049	-.047 ; .146	.032	.017	-.073 ; .107

Finland R² = .122
Slovenia R² = .013
Lithuania R² = .081

Finland: F(5,280) = 7.758, p < .001
Slovenia: F(5,332) = .884, p > .10
Lithuania: F(5,395) = 6.967, p < .001

Note. †p < .10; *p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001.

With teachers from Finland and Lithuania, the more confidence to teach learners with special educational needs was reported, the more positive were the attitudes towards inclusion and to have learners with special educational needs in mainstream schools. There were no relations with other background factors. The background factors did not predict positive attitudes of Slovenian teachers towards inclusion and to have learners with special educational needs in mainstream schools. Similarly, to the Sentiments sub-scale, comparing each independent variables' confidence intervals of non-standardized regression coefficients in the Attitudes sub-scale shows no significant differences between the countries as confidence intervals overlap. That is, there are no differences in the relations of any background factors in the attitudes towards inclusion and having learners with special educational needs in mainstream schools between the countries.

Concerns sub-scale. The results of the forced linear regression analysis for Concerns sub-scale can be seen in table 6.

Table 6: Result on the forced linear regression analysis on the relations of teachers' background factor and experiences on SACIE's Concerns sub-scale

	Finland			Slovenia			Lithuania		
	B	B	95% CI	β	B	95% CI	β	B	95% CI
Gender	.078†	.139	-.011 ; .289	.082	.192	-.038 ; .423	.074	.185	-.052 ; .421
Teaching Experience	.033	.003	-.004 ; .009	-.018	-.001	-.007 ; .005	-.159***	-.009	-.014 ; -.003
Knowledge on local disability laws and policies	.238***	.193	.102 ; .284	.154**	.111	.029 ; .194	.094	.059	-.019 ; .138
Level of confidence to teach LWD	.389***	.331	.223 ; .439	.147**	.139	.007 ; .271	.061†	.107	-.014 ; .227
Level of experience on teaching LWD	.170**	.116	.029 ; .202	.202**	.154	.045 ; .263	.012	.007	-.092 ; .106

Finland R² = .495
Slovenia R² = .187
Lithuania R² = .078

Finland: F(5,280) = 54.941, p < .001
Slovenia: F(5,333) = 15.288, p < .001
Lithuania: F(5,395) = 6.639, p < .001

Note. †p < .10; *p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001.

With Finnish and Slovenian teachers, the more knowledge on local disability laws and regulations, a higher level of confidence to teach learners with disabilities, and level of experience in teaching learners with disabilities were reported, the less concerns to have learners with disabilities in their own classroom were reported. Gender or teaching experience, in general, did not relate to Concerns sub-scale in Slovenia, and in Finland the relation was indicative. In Lithuania, however, only general teaching experience was related to the Concerns sub-scale. The higher level of teaching experience predicted more concerns for teachers to have learners with disabilities in their own classrooms. Other independent variables had no relation to the Concerns sub-scale with Lithuanian teachers. As other sub-scales, comparing each independent variable's confidence intervals of non-standardized regression coefficients in the Concerns sub-scale shows no significant differences between the countries as confidence intervals overlap. That is, there are no differences in the relations of any

background factors in the attitudes towards having students with disabilities in their own classrooms between the countries.

3.3 Comparison of SACIE sub-scales by country and teaching experience between 0-10 years and 11-44 years

Teachers in each country were categorised into two groups by 0-10 years and 11-44 years of teaching experience in each sub-scale. ANOVA and means, standard deviations, and 95% confidence intervals were also calculated for each group (see table 7).

Table 7. Means (M), standard deviations (SD), and 95% confidence intervals (CI) on the comparison of SACIE subscales by country and teaching experience.

		Finland		Slovenia		Lithuania	
		M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
		(95% CI)		(95% CI)		(95% CI)	
Sentiments	0-10	3.77	0.36	3.38	0.50	3.25	0.51
	yrs	(3.68 ; 3.85)		(3.27 ; 3.49)		(3.14 ; 3.36)	
Attitudes	11-44	3.72	0.44	3.44	0.52	3.17	0.52
	yrs	(3.66 ; 3.78)		(3.37 ; 3.50)		(3.12 ; 3.23)	
Concerns	0-10	2.63	0.47	2.44	0.40	2.44	0.56
	yrs	(2.52 ; 2.75)		(2.35 ; 2.54)		(2.34 ; 2.55)	
Attitudes	11-44	2.55	0.58	2.54	0.48	2.61	0.49
	yrs	(2.47 ; 2.62)		(2.48 ; 2.60)		(2.55 ; 2.66)	
Concerns	0-10	2.01	0.71	2.21	0.55	2.58	0.64
	yrs	(1.85 ; 2.17)		(2.08 ; 2.32)		(2.45 ; 2.71)	
Attitudes	11-44	2.07	0.78	2.20	0.59	2.44	0.53
	yrs	(1.97 ; 2.18)		(2.13 ; 2.28)		(2.37 ; 2.50)	

In Finland there was no statistically significant differences between teaching experience groups in any of the three sub-scales (Sentiments $F(1,287) = .637$, $p > 0.1$, $\text{partial-}\eta^2 = .002$, Attitudes $F(1,288) = 1.393$, $p > 0.1$, $\text{partial-}\eta^2 = .005$, Concerns $F(1,288) = .394$, $p > 0.1$, $\text{partial-}\eta^2 = .001$).

In Slovenia, there was no statistically significant difference between the teaching experience groups in Sentiments sub-scale, $F(1,336) = .868$, $p > 0.1$, $\text{partial-}\eta^2 = .003$, and Concerns sub-scale, $F(1,337) = .001$, $p > 0.1$, $\text{partial-}\eta^2 = .000$. The difference between teaching experience groups in Attitudes sub-scale was indicative, $F(1,336) =$

2.929, $p < .10$, $\text{partial-}\eta^2 = .009$. When examining the means of this sub-scale, it shows group with 0-10 years of teaching experience to be slightly more negative to have learners with disabilities in mainstream schools.

In Lithuania, there was no statistically significant difference in Sentiments sub-scale between the teaching experience groups, $F(1,406) = 1.390$, $p > 0.1$, $\text{partial-}\eta^2 = .003$. However, there were statistically significant differences in Attitudes sub-scale, $F(1,406) = 7.243$, $p < .01$, $\text{partial-}\eta^2 = .018$, and in Concerns sub-scale, $F(1,406) = 4.861$, $p < .05$, $\text{partial-}\eta^2 = .012$. In Lithuania, even though the group with 11-44 years of teaching experience seem to be more positive towards having learners in the mainstream schools, they seem to be more concerned on having a learner with disabilities in their own classroom than a group with 0-10 years of teaching experience.

4 DISCUSSION

This research aims to contribute to a more in-depth understanding of how inclusion is a contextualised phenomenon culturally and socially in different countries (Artiles & Dyson, 2005), specifically Finland, Slovenia, and Lithuania. It also contributes to the larger project where teachers' attitudes towards inclusion have been compared between different countries. In order to develop inclusion to serve different learners, it is essential to understand context-specific inclusion and create relevant ways to implement successful inclusive practices (Artiles & Dyson, 2005). Even if the philosophy behind the inclusion could be universal, practical solutions need to be moulded to serve the needs of each country.

4.1 Results and conclusions

In overall attitudes towards inclusive education, the differences between teachers from Finland, Slovenia, and Lithuania were not significant. However, differences between these countries were found when Sentiments, Attitudes, and Concerns were analysed separately. There are differences between the countries how teachers are willing to interact with persons with disabilities and how willing teachers are to have learners with disabilities in their own classrooms. Interestingly there was no difference between the countries with the attitudes on having learners with disabilities in mainstream schools.

Although teachers in Finland were found to be the most positive country to interact with persons with disabilities, Finnish teachers did have most concerns in having learners with disabilities in their classroom. As special education in Finland is organised inside mainstream schools, not in separate special schools, it may influence teachers so that they are generally more positive towards diversity (Saloviita & Schaffus, 2016). Finnish teachers were, however, worried about their skills and time to teach learners with disabilities, acceptance of learners with disabilities in the classroom, and how they can manage the workload. Time-management seems to be an essential factor for Finnish teachers (Saloviita, 2018). It could be, as Engelbrecht et

al. (2013) stated, that in Finland, the approach to inclusive education is more pragmatic related to implementation and has emphasised the role of special education professionals. Therefore, the implementation of inclusive education reminds more the forms of integration than inclusion, being influenced by historical structures of the country's educational system. Although diversity is accepted at the general level (Janhukainen, 2015), more emphasise would be needed on how to resolve teachers' need to have adequate resources in the schools.

Lithuanian data showed somewhat opposite end-results. Teachers in Lithuania were least concerned of the three countries but showed the most uncertainty to interact with persons with disabilities and how to react to another person's disability. During the last 20 years, Lithuania has gone through an educational reform from the segregative defectology towards more inclusive approach (Evans & Sabaliauskienė, 2010; Zelvys, 2004) and as many teachers with longer teaching experience have been trained and been working during the time of discriminative defectology and later the reformation, it may still reflect to the ideology of the teachers (Kugelmass & Galkiene, 2003; Stepaniuk, 2018). Teachers perhaps need more support in understanding disabilities and how they perceive persons with disabilities.

Previous experiences and other background factors do influence teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education and behaviour (Peček & Macura-Milovanović, 2012). Therefore, this paper investigated if five background factors (gender, teaching experience, knowledge on local disability laws and regulations, level of teaching experience on learners with disabilities, and level of confidence to teach learners with disabilities) have a relation to the teachers' attitudes in each country.

With Finnish teachers, the more knowledge on local disability laws and regulations teachers had, the more positive they were in interacting with persons with disabilities. As Saloviita (2018) stated, teachers' attitudes can reflect the general atmosphere of laws on inclusion, and therefore, the better teacher understands the law, it will reflect on their attitudes and possibly their behaviour. With Lithuanian teachers, a higher level of confidence to teach learners with disabilities predicted significantly more positive attitudes on interacting with persons with disabilities. As Avramidis and Norwich (2002) have concluded, when teachers have been given an opportunity

to develop necessary expertise, their attitudes will become more positive. Naturally, this raises the question of providing necessary training and support for the teachers. With Slovenian teachers, this same relation was indicative. As teacher's confidence grows, it reduces the fear of interaction with persons with disabilities, and the feeling of incompetence to teach that are also found to be contributing factors to negative attitudes of Slovenian teacher candidates (Peček & Macura-Milovanović, 2012). These factors should also be reflected in teacher training if there is a wish to support the development of inclusive education in the future

Even there was no difference between the countries how teachers felt about learners with disabilities in mainstream schools as measured by the sub-scale Attitudes, there was, however, differences in background factors related to Attitudes sub-scale between the countries. Finnish teachers' gender and knowledge on local disability laws and regulations were related to positive attitudes on having learners with disabilities in mainstream schools. Gender is a problematic factor, as Saloviita (2018), in his article, reflects that there are researches that confirm females to be more positive as well researches that confirms the opposite. In this research, teaching seems to be a very female-dominant profession; an average of 88.33% of all participants in this research was female. In both Finland and Lithuania, the higher level of confidence to teach learners with disabilities teachers reported, the more positive were their attitudes on having learners with disabilities in mainstream schools. Providing relevant training for the pre- and in-service teachers should, therefore, be a priority for the policymakers (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002).

In Slovenia, these background factors did not have any relation to teachers' attitudes on having learners with disabilities in mainstream schools. Although Slovenia has a history in developing their understanding of special education needs and has had a close relationship with West, it still has not defined the concept of inclusiveness on the national level (Lesar, 2018). This might have an impact on how teachers perceive inclusion in mainstream schools and what factors might have a relation to their attitudes. Lesar (2018) concludes that more effort should be given to improve the culture of institutions to promote inclusion and to support teachers to

present inclusive values and attitudes in order to promote inclusive practices in mainstream schools.

Three factors were related with teachers from Finland and Slovenia on attitudes towards having learners with disabilities in teacher's own classroom; the more teacher knew the local disability laws and regulations, the more confidence to teach learners with disabilities they were, and the more experience on teaching learners with disabilities they had, the more positive were the attitudes. Also, Kavkler et al. (2015), in their paper, found these factors affecting the quality of inclusive education in Slovenia. They called out the need for additional training for teachers and providing them needed support, also financial support to implement the policies successfully. In Finland, this is understandable as the approach to inclusive education has been very pragmatic (Engelbrecht et al., 2013), and traditionally, the responsibility of education of learners with disabilities have been on special education teachers (Saloviita, 2018). When teachers feel having adequate skills and tools to teach learners with disabilities, gaining experience, and understand the regulations, it will reduce the anxiety towards having learners in their own classroom.

Lithuania was an exception in this group as the less teachers had teaching experience, the more positive they were to have learners with disabilities in their own classrooms. As Lithuania started a revision of Education Law and its amendments at the end of the 1990s (Kugelmass & Galkiene, 2003), the younger generation of teachers, who has less experience, may already be impacted by the more specific emphasis of inclusive education in Lithuanian schools.

In order to understand the possible transition in attitudes between the generations in these countries, teachers in each country were compared by their teaching experiences. In Finland, there was no difference in how much teachers have teaching experience towards their attitudes in general. It is in line with the conclusion of Saloviita and Schaffus (2016) that there is no difference between the age groups of Finnish teachers on their attitudes towards inclusive education. The same pattern was found in with Slovenian teachers, although in the Attitudes sub-scale, the difference between groups of 0-10 and 11-44 of teaching experience was indicative, teachers with less experience were more negative to have learners with disabilities in mainstream

schools. As the concept of inclusiveness is not clear in Slovenia, it has also influenced the teachers' training programs that seem to promote more integration than inclusive approach (Lesar, 2018), and therefore, it requires changes in Slovenian teacher training. It is important to ensure adequately trained teachers (Peček & Macura-Milovanović, 2012) so they have the preparedness to teach different learners.

In Lithuania, results were more complex. There was a significant difference in attitudes to have learners with disabilities in mainstream schools and the teacher's own classrooms. Teachers who had more experience were more positive to have learners with disabilities in mainstream schools. Lithuania's history under the former Soviet Union had an impact on their educational systems. After gaining independence, Lithuania started to reach international co-operation and participated in several international conventions (Kugelmass & Galkiene, 2003) that influenced the need to reconstruct educational laws and in 1991 Lithuania started to draft a law that ensured the right to education for every child in the country. This step towards a more democratic society has impacted the general attitudes towards inclusive education.

However, teachers with less experience were more positive to have learners with disabilities in their own classroom, which was also found when investigating the relation of teaching experience in Lithuania on having a learner with disabilities in the teacher's own classroom (see chapter 3.2). This indicates that in Lithuania, there is a transition in the attitudes of the younger generation towards disability issues and the way they perceive teaching different learners. This claim is also supported by the research of Šukys et al. (2015). Their paper states that teachers with less experience to be more positive towards learners with disabilities. Teachers with more experience seem to be negative or neutral in their attitudes (Šukys et al., 2015) as old traditional approaches with the more medical approach to disabilities and separate individual support is still dominating in implementation (Alisauskas et al., 2015) despite the development of more democratic society.

Although Saloviita (2018) states that globally researches have shown very similar results according to inclusive education, it is still safe to address that it is clear, there are differences between the countries, in this matter on teachers' sentiments, attitudes, and concerns. Countries do also differ in which factors were related to teachers'

attitudes towards inclusive education. There was also some influence of societal change on attitudes of teachers in Lithuania. This kind of information provides a better understanding of inclusion in its local context and gives us tools on how to support teachers to provide good quality inclusive education. It provides an opportunity to identify how the needs of each country are different. When inclusion is discussed as a global phenomenon, it is crucial to understand its context-relation and respect it when creating structures and guidelines on an international, national, and local level. Teachers require more support and training in order to develop their confidence to teach learners with disabilities and to have a better understanding of inclusive education. When planning these support mechanisms, hopefully, nation-specific needs are recognised.

4.2 Reliability and Limitations

This research has 1067 participants, which supports the generalisation of the results. This is in line with Saloviita's (2018) wish to have more research on attitudes towards inclusive education with over 1000 participants. However, in each country, there were 294 - 421 participants per country, and therefore it could be beneficial to have more participants from each country that results would have better generalizability also on the country level.

The research was done by using the SACIE scale that has been used in several pieces of research, and its reliability has been analysed several times. Although the translation process can influence the scale, they were tested for reliability through Cronbach's alpha. However, it is good to notice that in SACIE, disability-specific terms have been used, and therefore, it may not give a complete overall picture of attitudes towards inclusive education if we think it as a broader term, like the inclusion of children with behavioural and learning difficulties. (Ewing et al., 2018) Although, some terminology used in SACIE does suit while generally discussing special educational needs.

It is important to notice that the data were collected in 2010 -11. After years of 2010-11, many changes have occurred in the education sector in these countries, and

therefore, the situation may appear differently in the present day. In data, there might be some reservations towards the results of the Sentiments sub-scale as it was so skewed. As there were practically no variations, especially on Finnish data, it automatically creates a skewed variable.

This research does provide information on teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education and having learners with disabilities in their schools and classrooms and has emphasised the importance of teachers' attitudes. However, it good to be reminded, as Although Rimm-Kaufman, Storm, Sawyer, Pianta, & LaParo (2006) state, that on the other hand teachers' attitudes do not necessarily transfer to classroom practices.

4.3 Future research

As this paper provides another step in understanding contexts of inclusive education, deeper understanding would be needed. In order to develop more successful and inclusive practices, there is a need to understand the factors behind these findings. Mixed-methods research could provide more in-depth information, as done by, for example, Engelbrecht and Savolainen (2018). It would also be helpful to continue research on focusing on the Theory of Planned Behaviour's two other themes; social norms and efficacy (Sharma et al. 2018) in order to have an in-depth understanding.

Also, presently in cross-cultural studies on attitudes, the focus seems to be on a high- and middle-income countries. No one can deny that education and economics are intertwined. Even if inclusive education is seen as a human rights-based issue, economics have impacted the implementation. (Artiles & Dyson, 2005) Therefore, it would be interesting and necessary to investigate sentiments, attitudes, and concerns of teachers in low-middle- and low-income countries. Although international studies have also been conducted in resource-poor countries (Saloviita, 2018), it would be important for those countries to be more presented in comparative studies.

Inclusive education is a process that evolves continuously, as countries develop their practices relevant to their needs. Comparative studies can provide in-depth understanding and tools on inclusive education as well as an opportunity to learn from

each other. Referring to Artiles and Dyson (2005), understanding the cultural differences is a not reason to hinder the development of inclusive education, but it provides an opportunity to alter cultural practices in order to create successful educational structures and practices that enable schooling for everyone, opening new possibilities.

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